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Anna Vaninskaya
University of Denver, CO

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Anna Vaninskaya
University of Denver
Denver, CO

Spectacle is an integral part of Shakespeare's plays, and contributes a visual dimension to the thematic development. Whether described verbally when physical constraints prevent it from being shown or actually present on stage in the form of props, costumes or scenery, the visual icon provides an Eliot-like "objective correlative" for particular motifs and emotions. At times it may embody the attitude of a character, as with the contemptuous implications of the gift of tennis balls in *The Life of Henry the Fifth* (*H5*), or symbolize his inner nature, as with the outward appearance of the villainous protagonist in *The Tragedy of Richard the Third* (*R3*), or it may serve as a physical metaphor of an abstract search for justice, like the arrows in *The Tragedy of Titus*

Andronicus (*Tit.*). While verbal depiction is a tool shared by all literary modes, physical representation is peculiar to the dramatic form. But the two act in concert to create an additional referential level in the play. This correspondence between an idea and its material incarnation (seen either literally or as an imagined object) is at times more complex than the straightforward transmutation of prop into symbol that Alan Downer explains in his essay "The Life of Our Design." Metaphoric language in general operates by concrete objects rather than by abstract concepts or categories, so the actual presence of visual referents allows the characters to speak, as it were, in 'things.' The Dolphin expresses his scorn for Henry's claims and his estimation of the latter's immaturity by means of tennis balls, which embody the "barbarous license" of his youth (*H5* I.ii.271). The physical object *is* the insult. A similar dynamic is also at work in the visual-thematic relations of the other plays.

Henry V is notable for immediately calling attention to the importance of verbal spectacle, and the Prologue is the instrument *par excellence* to fill a bare stage ("this unworthy scaffold" (*H5* Pro.10), "this wooden O" (*H5* Pro.13)) with "imaginary" people and scenery (*H5* Pro.18). This figure sometimes appears in visually striking guise. The Rumor in *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth* (*2H4*), for example, is "painted full of tongues" to

represent the traditional conception of Virgil's *Fama* as a monster that spreads lies and slanders (*2H4* Ind. o.s.d.). Although the outward appearance of the Chorus in *Henry V* is not specified, its function is to paint for the audience the grandiose settings of Henry's exploits. It is a formal, distancing device (absent for the most part from the other sections of the tetralogy), which creates a visual and structural equivalent for the epic thrust of the play. The play's purpose in portraying the emergence of a national hero, the grand scale of his victories, and his status as the ideal monarch is seconded by the physical detailing of the introductory descriptive passages. The common metonymic trope of designating kingship by the crown, already employed by Shakespeare in the scene of Henry's premature attempt to take it from his father in *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*, is developed to an even higher degree by the symbolic operation of the multiple elements of the choric pictures.

In the Prologue's first speech, the spectacle of "vasty fields of France" (*H5* Pro.12), "two mighty monarchies, / Whose high, upreared, and abutting fronts / The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder" (*H5* Pro.20-22), and armies on horseback is offered as the backdrop against which the "warlike Harry" shall make his appearance (*H5* Pro.5). The Choruses for the subsequent acts build up the grandeur of the setting through which "the mirror of

all Christian kings" will move (*H5* II.Cho.6). He sails to France on a "fleet majestical"(*H5* III.Cho.16), whose "silken streamers" flutter against the rising sun (*H5* III.Cho.6). The vocabulary soars with the "lofty surge" of the sea (*H5* III.Cho.13), and as the cannons fire on besieged Harflew, "down goes all before them" (*H5* III.Cho.34). The visual build-up reaches a crescendo in Act V, where all of London pours out in exultant celebration to greet "their conqu'ring Caesar" (*H5* V.Cho.28). These larger-than-life displays, too large at any rate for the "little room" and "small time" of the theater, are the objectified equivalents of the epic grandeur of Henry V: the person and his accomplishments. His kingly nature, his "largess universal, like the sun" (*H5* IV.Cho.43), and his "port of Mars" (*H5* Pro.6.) are provided with a visual counterpart in the "swelling scene" (*H5* Pro.4). Similar aggregations of people and shifts of setting occur in Shakespeare's other plays, but here they are foregrounded structurally by the independence of the choric sections, whose constant appeals to the audience to "imagine," "suppose," "think," and "see" specifically call attention to these elements of spectacle. The huge fleets, the crowd scenes, the vast distances that the audience is transported: all such instances of verbal visualizing present in physical form King Henry's "inward greatness" and the "mighty heart" of England (*H5* II.Cho.16-7).

By no means are all the correspondences in the play so complex or extended. There are a number of straightforward and localized symbols. Burgundy's detailed description of the French landscape as a wild and untended garden, where nothing grows but ugly weeds, is not only a literal depiction of the ravages the war has inflicted on the country's agriculture but also an epic simile in reverse order: "Even so our houses, and ourselves, and children [...] grow like savages [...to] everything that seems unnatural" (*H5* V.ii.56-62). This fits in perfectly with Downer's definition: the devastated landscape symbolizes the absence of "gentle Peace" (*H5* V.ii.65), without at the same time losing its "thingness." This is also the case with Henry's disguise and exchange of gloves with Michael Williams in Act IV.i. Both the cloak that allows Henry to go among his soldiers unrecognized and the gage that signifies a quarrel between its bearers are simultaneously physical props and thematic emblems. The first is the embodiment of the "common man" within the king (*H5* IV.viii.51), the second an objectified pledge of the truth of Henry's word.

Perhaps the single most important visual aspect of *Richard III* is the central character's deformed appearance. The plot of the play hinges on Richard's decision "to prove a villain / And hate the idle pleasures of these days" (*R3* I.i.30-1) because he "cannot prove a lover" (*R3*

I.i.28). His atrophied conscience and monstrous crimes, he proclaims in his soliloquies, are the result of his ugliness, over which he has no control: "since the heavens have shap'd my body so, / Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it" (*3H6* V.vi.78-9). Because of his shriveled arm, his hunchback and lame leg, Richard can neither feel nor evoke love. He is isolated, and "since this earth affords no joy to me / But to command," he will pass by no crime to attain the English crown (*3H6* III.ii.165-6). Richard's looks are the major motivation for his deeds, and this fact with such significant thematic implications is naturally allotted a great deal of verbal description. He is "an unlick'd bear-whelp" (*3H6* III.ii.161), a "misshap'd trunk" (*3H6* III.ii.170), "an indigested and deformed lump" (*3H6* V.vi.51), "rudely stamp'd" (*R3* I.i.16), "[c]heated of feature by dissembling nature" (*R3* I.i.19), "unfinish'd" (*R3* I.i.20), "scarce half made up" (*R3* I.i.21) and a plethora of other unflattering epithets. Presumably, his appearance would also be portrayed physically by the actor with the use of costume and makeup.

In few of the other plays is such an emphasis placed on the outward aspect of the hero. Richard's enemies, like Henry VI, Lady Anne, and Queen Margaret, never forego the chance to bring it to the spectator's attention, and the villain himself often remarks bitterly on his deformities. Whatever may be the historical basis for

this portrait, the concentration on Richard's ugliness is also an extreme expression of the old convention whereby a character's evil nature manifests itself visibly. The hideousness of his soul, which knows "neither pity, love, nor fear," is made incarnate in his repulsive body (*3H6* V.vi.68). His lack of conscience is perceptible to sight. The horror of Richard's actions: the murder of Clarence and the young princes, the execution of Hastings and Buckingham, and the methodical elimination of everyone who stands in his way to the throne, is literally personified in his horrible form. His sins sit in his face; he is a walking 'picture of Dorian Gray,' and when the other characters abuse his looks they are implicitly commenting on his corrupted nature.

Richard himself sees the connection between visual attributes and personality. The spectacle of a baby with teeth "plainly signified / That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog" (*3H6* V.vi.76-7). In this he merely agrees with Henry VI, who observes, just before Richard kills him: "Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou was born, / To signify thou cam'st to bite the world" (*3H6* V.vi.53-4). Both understand the symbolic implications of appearance, as well as of natural phenomena. Henry VI speaks of the omens that presaged Richard's birth: birds cried, "dogs howl'd, and hideous tempest shook down trees" (*3H6* V.vi.46). Just like the circumstances which

attend Owen Glendower's nativity in *The First Part of Henry the Fourth*, these natural spectacles are meant to embody the protagonist's human essence. Richard is a curse to the world, he brings discord and pain, the very earth groans at his arrival in a kind of cosmic pathetic fallacy. Not merely his personal looks, but the physical world itself reflect Richard's depravity.

There are a number of other visual elements that reinforce particular ideas in the play. The tableau arranged by Buckingham in Act III.vii for the scene of Richard's 'reluctant' acceptance of the kingship is deliberately emblematic. Richard stands aloft between two bishops, "a book of prayer in his hand," while the Mayor, the Aldermen, and the citizens are below, in a supplicating position (*R3* III.vii.98). Buckingham himself points out the symbolic significance of the arrangement. The clergymen are "[t]wo props of virtue for a Christian prince, / To stay him from the fall of vanity" (*R3* III.vii.96-7), the prayer book, "true ornaments to know a holy man" (*R3* III.vii.99). The whole is like a set piece from some religious painting, carefully calculated to impress the credulous with Richard's metaphorically elevated righteousness. Buckingham, like Richard with his looks, is aware of the symbolic import of physical relationships, and successfully employs the effects of staging to win Richard his crown. Later on, in his piteous description of the two

sleeping princes, "girdling one another / Within their alablaster innocent arms," with yet another prayer book on their pillow, Tyrrel also seems to be conscious of the emotional impact of visible tableaux (*R3* IV.iii.10-1). The princes' pose is indicative of their innocence, as Richard's high placement and companions are of his 'virtue.' And finally, the dream of the ghosts before the battle of Bosworth Field is perhaps the most straightforward occurrence of the correspondence. They are the embodied apparitions of Richard's guilty conscience, awake at last before the end. In this case actual actors serve as the physical representations of mental torment. The guilty thoughts assume the corporeal form of Richard's victims: "the souls of all that I had murther'd / Came to my tent" (*R3* V.iii.204-5). They are the symbols of his defeat and despair.

Although there are a variety of murders, on and off stage, in *Richard III* and the other plays here considered, the bloody spectacle acquires a new significance in *Titus Andronicus*. Its violence is graphically visual; the mounting atrocities assault the spectator's sight. The play opens with the bearing in of a coffin, a common evocation of death, set next to its other emblem, the tomb of the Andronici. Several minutes later the sacrifice of Alarbus is ordered, and Titus's sons return "with their swords bloody" (*Tit.* I.i.s.d.). Before the viewers have a chance

to catch their breath, Titus kills Mutius before their very eyes, and he too is put in the tomb. By the time the first scene closes, the audience has already witnessed a massacre on a scale usually reserved for final acts. But the visual overload only intensifies. Bassianus is stabbed, Lavinia is raped, and her hands and tongue cut off, Aaron chops off Titus's hand, the heads of the executed Quintus and Martius are brought in, and the Nurse and Clown are murdered. In the horrific fifth act, Titus cuts the throats of Chiron and Demetrius and serves them as dishes to their mother. He then kills Lavinia and Tamora and dies himself at the hand of Saturninus, who is instantly dispatched by Lucius. The play is a veritable bloodbath, and the physical portrayal of the brutality is intensified by the verbal descriptions. For every sight like that of the mutilated Lavinia there is a word-picture to match: "Alas, a crimson river of warm blood, / Like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind, / Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips" (*Tit.* II.iv.22-4). At times, the cumulative effect becomes unbearable.

Though it may seem so in parts, the visual violence is not gratuitous. Just like Richard's appearance, it corresponds to an inner reality. "Rome is but a wilderness of tigers," Titus tells Lucius, "Tigers must prey, and Rome affords no prey / But me and mine" (*Tit.* III.i.54-6). Lucius calls Aaron (*Tit.* V.iii.5), and later Tamora, a

"ravenous tiger" (*Tit.* V.iii.195), "her life was beastly" (*Tit.* V.iii.199); Lavinia, before she is ravished, uses the same words of the Queen of the Goths. In fact, animal imagery predominates in the depiction of character: Aaron calls himself a "black dog" (*Tit.* V.i.122); Tamora and her two sons are "[a] pair of cursed hell-hounds and their dame" (*Tit.* V.ii.144). Everything conspires, therefore, to emphasize the predatory nature of those involved, the inhumanity of Roman, Goth and Moor. All fall victim to their own unnatural cruelty. The culmination of the spiritual and physical atrocities is achieved in the final feast scene, where Tamora feeds upon her own flesh and blood. By this point the spectator has surfeited on both verbal and visual representations of moral depravity.

The play is unusual not only in its accumulation of corpses but also in its high level of saturation with physical elements of all kinds. In direct contrast to the sparse and self-consciously bare *Henry V*, *Titus* is filled with people (e.g. the stage directions in the first Act call for "others as many as can be" (*Tit.* I.i.s.d.), and hounds, props like horns, arrows, a basket with pigeons, Marcus's staff, Aaron's bag of gold, and uncommon scenery like the pit in the forest. Each of these objects has a second level of significance. Titus's arrows to the gods are the physical embodiment of the rhetorical search for justice. The hounds at the hunt are the objective manifestation of the

animal imagery that characterizes the humans in the play. The pit is reminiscent of the mouth of hell; in fact, the editor's note points out that on stage it would be represented by a hell-mouth prop. Whoever falls into it, like Bassianus and Titus's sons, is doomed. It is located in a dreadful vale, full of ravens, snakes and toads, where "never shines the sun" (*Tit.* II.iii.96). The description paints a loathsome, abhorred and "very fatal place" (*Tit.* II.iii.202), "this unhallow'd and blood-stained hole" (*Tit.* II.iii.210), "this detested, dark, blood-drinking pit" (*Tit.* II.iii.224), "this fell devouring receptacle, / As hateful as Cocytus' misty mouth" (*Tit.* II.iii.235-6). The landscape, like the shockingly violent behavior, is symbolic of the wildness and bloodthirstiness of the society portrayed in *Titus Andronicus*. Other visual elements, like Aaron's blackness, also function as physical counterparts to a moral quality: "his soul black like his face" (*Tit.* III.i.205). The cliché of black as evil is given a material reality; like his soul and his skin, Aaron's "[a]cts [are] of black night" (*Tit.* V.i.64).

Alan Downer's requirement that spectacle be symbolic "without losing its reality" is certainly fulfilled in Shakespeare's plays. On the one hand, the visual elements are literal components of the plot. Henry's voyages and battles, for example, are chronicled events with no any inherent secondary meaning. Richard's caricatured looks

(whether or not they have some basis in historical fact) function sufficiently well at the level of mere physical description, with no necessary metaphorical implications. Similarly, the atrocities in *Titus* are the logical outcome of two phases of revenge. And yet, all of these visual frameworks, constituted of verbal and material components, also take on a symbolic dimension. In each drama, the emblematic weight of the spectacle provides an "objective correlative" for the main thematic focus. In the case of Henry's crusade against the French, the grandeur of the poetic tableaux portraying his fleet, his camp, the encounters in the field, and the glorious homecoming, is the physical equivalent or "model [of the] inward greatness" of the English sovereign and his realm. The very opposite of such patriotic celebration of the nation in the person of the heroic monarch is Richard III. The profundity of this character surpasses a merely formulaic (self)-identification with the allegorical Vice figure of morality plays ("Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word" (*R3* III.i.79-83)). As Alan Dessen points out, "Richard is an epitome of what is wrong with England"; there is a direct link between the king and the health of his kingdom, only *Richard III* is the reverse of *Henry V* (*Shakespeare* 43). The murderer's distorted appearance is the hideous incarnation of his sinful spirit, a testament to the evil within that deforms the outer shell,

which in turn prompts the criminal to further monstrous deeds in a vicious circle spiraling finally out of control. Dessen, in *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*, warns against considering "Elizabethan stage violence" in too realistic terms (129). It is "metaphoric or symbolic" (130), and even the relentless bloodletting of *Titus Andronicus* carries a symbolic meaning for an audience that has been thrust into an awareness of the moral depravity and predatory bestiality of the social world of the play.

Shakespeare's spectacle is at once concretely itself and an embodiment of abstract ideas. As Alan Dessen demonstrates at length in *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye*, the playwright uses "visual analogues," stage directions, and the "language of actions" as "dramatic shorthand" (73) for the creation of "a special emphasis, a theatrical *italics*, that singles out a [particular] moment for the eye (and mind) of the viewer" (76). "The dramatist is not limited solely to verbal display of a major image at climactic points in the action but can resort as well to stage business, costumes, groupings, sound effects, and other nonverbal devices to underscore a developing pattern for the viewer" (87).

This "symbolic or imagistic (or emblematic or iconographic) potential in [...] stage properties or costumes (or tableaux or gestures)" is by no means confined

to the three plays here discussed (71). The iteration of physical images is the hallmark of Elizabethan drama, but it is not often that the verbal spectacle of the poetry and the concrete reality of the stage work in concert to produce a visual parallel or symbol for the overall thematic design.

Notes

1 Quotations also taken from *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* (*3H6*).

2 Cf. Queen Margaret's description of Richard as a "dog [...] when he bites, / His venom tooth will rankle to the death" (*R3* I.iii.288-90).

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